

TENNESSEE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
FISCAL REVIEW COMMITTEE



**FISCAL NOTE**

**HB 908 - SB 1014**

March 12, 2021

**SUMMARY OF BILL:** Prohibits the Department of Children's Services (DCS) from accepting reports of suspected child abuse or neglect, including sexual abuse, from a person who refuses to provide their name and contact information. Allows a person who has been accused of such offenses to petition the court to order DCS to reveal the identity of the person who reported the suspected offense.

**ESTIMATED FISCAL IMPACT:**

**Other Fiscal Impact – The proposed legislation could result in an increase in state expenditures to the Department of Children's Services (DCS) due to an increase in the length of custody stays, trauma treatment services, and intensive prevention services. There could also be a decrease in expenditures to the DCS as a result of a decreased number of child abuse investigations, a net decrease in the number of children receiving services from DCS, and potentially the number of child abuse investigators needed at the Department. The net fiscal impact of those offsetting factors is dependent on unknown variables and cannot be reasonably determined.**

Assumptions:

- Based on information provided by DCS, the Department receives an average of 23,706 anonymous reports of child abuse or neglect each year.
- The Department estimates that approximately 44 percent of those are initially screened out, and then an estimated 30 percent of the remaining are ultimately substantiated for investigation.
- If DCS is no longer able to accept anonymous reports, an estimated 3,983  $[(23,706 - 44.0\%) \times 30.0\%]$  cases of child abuse and neglect could either go uninvestigated or the investigation and resolution could be severely delayed, resulting in otherwise preventable prolonged abuse.
- The DCS estimates the effects of such prolonged abuse could significantly increase the length of stays for children who end up in custody in order to address the resulting trauma, and an increase in the need for intensive prevention services; both of which could carry significant fiscal impacts to DCS. However, the extent of the increase in such services due to delayed investigations is dependent on a range of unknown factors, and thus cannot be estimated with any degree of certainty.

- Removing the requirement of DCS to accept an estimated 23,706 anonymous reports and investigate an estimated 3,983 of such reports of child abuse and neglect each year could reduce the investigations caseload on the Department, and the total number of children receiving services from the Department. However, it is assumed that the majority of these cases would eventually be reported to the Department by someone – a nurse, neighbor, school official, relative – willing to provide their name and contact information. Any potential decrease in investigations and resulting cases is dependent on various unknown factors and cannot be determined with any degree of certainty.
- The potential increase in expenditures due to the increase in treatment and prevention services, and the decrease in expenditures due to potential decreased investigations and reduction in the number of children receiving DCS services are estimated to have offsetting fiscal impacts; the precise net impact to DCS cannot be reasonably determined.
- The proposed legislation is not expected to significantly increase the caseload of the courts; any fiscal impact to the courts is estimated to be not significant.

#### **CERTIFICATION:**

The information contained herein is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.



Bojan Savic, Interim Executive Director

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